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## ABSTRACT

Improving communications between administration and staff members is an urgent, ongoing need. Schools should adopt a communications philosophy in conjunction with continuing communication effectiveness. These evaluations must have clear and understandable objectives, mainly to pinpoint communication strengths and weaknesses. All essential components must be considered for an effective survey. Communications ethics, climate, channels, methods, content, timing, and feedback are all deserving of measurement as are supervisor-subordinate exchange and information sources. A comprehensive communications effectiveness survey and examples of successful school site practices are included. (EJS)

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# THE PRACTITIONER

nassp

A Newsletter for the On-Line Administrator

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## Assessing the Communications Effectiveness of Your School

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# THE PRACTITIONER

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## Assessing the Communications Effectiveness of Your School

Improving communications between the administration and staff members in our nation's secondary schools is an urgent, pervasive, and ongoing need.

The first step toward meeting this pressing need is to adopt a schoolwide communications philosophy in tandem with setting important continuing goals. Policies should be established to facilitate both the continuing goals and the communications objectives and priorities.

One of these policies should require annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's communications system and programs. The evaluation should be systematic, comprehensive, and relevant, and should include assessment of the performance of the principal and assistant principals as individual communicators. The communications evaluation should encompass both goals and related processes. A carefully designed survey instrument should be used.

Many management authorities contend that the primary duty of a manager is to establish and maintain an effective communications system. Yet, as important as communication is, few managers and organizations take the time or make the effort to systematically organize, coordinate, and evaluate their communications system and programs.

Any evaluation of a manager's or organization's communications effectiveness must have clear and understandable objectives. Managers must ask themselves: "What do we want to know as a result of the assessment?" and "What do we want to see happen (or be able to do) as a result of the audit?"

The goals of the assessment should be to establish

whether or not the right information is getting to the right people, at the right time, by the right method, through the right channels.

### Essential Components of Assessment

The major objective of a communications survey is to pinpoint specific communications strengths and weaknesses at your school. All essential communications components must be evaluated:

- People involved (senders and receivers)
- Message (content)
- Methods (media)
- Channels (routes)
- Timing (situation)
- Feedback (response).

Each of these key elements of communication is affected significantly by the climate of the school as well as by administrator-staff relations. These elements and the ethics of the communications process also deserve to be measured.

#### 1. COMMUNICATIONS ETHICS

To succeed, communications must be viewed by receiver(s) as ethical. Communications ethics involves knowing and following certain standards and practices. Honesty, consistency, and openness (while protecting the rights of privacy) are at the core of commu-

nications ethics. Using information for service to people rather than for power over them is fundamental to ethical communications.

## 2. COMMUNICATIONS CLIMATE

All communicating occurs in a climate or prevailing environment. Climate consists of people's general perceptions of an organization and its members. It can be manifested in an overall situation when a message is sent or received (e.g., habitual low morale); a general mood or atmosphere at a particular time; (e.g., in the midst of negotiations); or the context when a message is received (e.g., alone or with a group of influential colleagues). A healthy climate is necessary for truly effective communications to take place.

## 3. COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS (The "Where")

The channels of communication are the routes or networks established for the distribution and reception of communications throughout the school. Channels are the directions of flow (and not necessarily identical to the chain of command): upward, downward, and lateral. Both formal (official—e.g., teachers with department heads) and informal (unofficial—e.g., rumors) exist at any school. Although informal channels are faster and more personal, they are also less accurate and reliable.

## 4. COMMUNICATIONS METHODS (The "How")

The medium is often more influential than the actual message. The form of communications can be more powerful than the substance. Communications methods include media, devices, and techniques.

Methods are divided into three distinct categories: verbal, written, and pictorial. Media may be further classified by: (1) formal, and (2) informal. Formal methods are planned and emphasize the needs of the receiver (e.g., memos and conferences). Informal methods are essentially unplanned and emphasize the needs of the sender (a quick note or casual conversation).

## 5. COMMUNICATIONS CONTENT (The "What")

The content is at the heart of the communications process. Without a meaningful message, there is no real need to communicate. The content or message is concerned with the substance of a communication. Effective messages also state the purpose (the why) clearly and early in the communication.

Three kinds of content can be contained in a message: facts, ideas, and feelings. Typically, messages

emphasize facts or ideas and deemphasize feelings, so they are viewed as depersonalized and cold.

## 6. COMMUNICATIONS TIMING (The "When")

Proper timing is essential for a message to have maximum impact. Effective communications are continuous rather than sporadic. Timing involves factors such as frequency, spacing, existing situation or circumstances, and events occurring immediately before and after the sending and receiving of a message.

Timing can be affected by: time of day (early or late), time of week (beginning or end), time of month (near a major holiday), time of year (start or close of school), and receiver's mood and most receptive time. It is especially important to time major changes and bad news carefully.

## 7. COMMUNICATIONS FEEDBACK (The Response)

Feedback is a vital, but frequently overlooked, component of the communications process. It consists of the receiver(s) of a message letting the sender know if the intent and content of the message is correctly understood.

Feedback is a vital verification tool. Effective communication requires opportunities for initial input (before the fact) and feedback (after the fact).

## 8. SUPERVISOR-SUBORDINATE COMMUNICATIONS

Administrator-faculty/staff communication is usually vertical (as opposed to lateral) because it flows upward and downward between people of unequal "rank" in an organization. This kind of communication should facilitate a two-way exchange of information. Effective supervisor-subordinate communication minimizes differences in rank, position, degrees, age, and seniority at the school.

## 9. COMMUNICATIONS SOURCES (The "Who")

The primary internal sources of information are: each member of the administration, faculty, and other staff; each student; and each community volunteer. Other valuable sources are personal observations, examining documents firsthand, research reports, and computer databases.

No information can be better than its source. Credible sources of information are candid, current, complete, correct, clear, and relevant. It is also important to note that it is sometimes appropriate to bypass the official channels of communication to get vital information directly from the person who is best informed

on the matter; e.g., sensitive information from a gang leader.

If one or more of the categories outlined above and contained in the following survey instrument appear

to be a special problem for your school, you might want to evaluate these in greater detail. Additional items are listed for each of the categories in the November 1989 NASSP Bulletin, pages 99-109.

## Communications Effectiveness Survey

The evaluation instrument that follows attempts to cover each of the components of the communications process. School leaders can use this instrument to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their existing communications process and to plan for appropriate changes or enhancements.

*Instructions for completing the survey.* Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Six columns are provided for your answers. Check only the most appropriate column for each question. If the question does not apply or the answer is unknown, simply check column 6.

The rating scale is as follows:

- 1 = Always or Superior
- 2 = Usually or Strongly
- 3 = Sometimes or Satisfactory

- 4 = Rarely or Marginal
- 5 = Never or Inferior
- 6 = Unknown or Not Applicable

### Section I Communications Ethics

Definition: Communications ethics relate to proper communications standards and practices.

|                                                                                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Confidential information is clearly identified and protected.                                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. The individual staff member's rights to privacy are respected and safeguarded.                |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Information is conveyed in a straightforward manner.                                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Management's actions are consistent with its words.                                           |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Information is provided internally before it is released to the public.                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Administrators actively support communications goals, policies, and programs.                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. All affected persons are informed of expectations, rights, responsibilities, and precautions. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8. Bad news as well as good news is shared in an objective manner.                               |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9. People are supplied the necessary information to do their jobs well.                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. The reasons for important decisions and actions are shared honestly with people.             |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Section 2 Communications Climate

Definition: The climate of the organization refers to the general perception people have of an organization and its members.

|                                                                                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. People are approachable and readily available to each other.                                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Status, position, and seniority are more important than people being treated as equals.      |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Management projects the attitude that "we care about you as an important and valued person." |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. People feel respected, listened to, understood, and responded to.                            |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. A feeling of mutual trust exists among fellow workers and between management and employees.  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Sensitive problems and serious conflict are faced and discussed candidly.                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. People feel supported by their fellow workers and backed by management.                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8. The work climate is open and relaxed rather than defensive and uptight.                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9. People feel uninformed and rumors are frequent and widespread about important matters.       |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. Management is receptive to suggestions and either follows up or explains denials.           |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11. People know what to expect, where they stand, and how they are doing.                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 12. The opportunity for input exists before important decisions are made and actions are taken. |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Section 3 Communications Channels

Definition: Channels of communication are the routes or levels by which messages flow in an organization. Channels are *not* synonymous with chain of command or methods of communicating.

|                                                                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Responsibility is fixed for organizing and coordinating all important messages.    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Proper (approved) channels for communicating are identified, known and understood. |   |   |   |   |   |   |

|                                                                                                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. Certain management positions or levels of management are viewed as habitual communications bottlenecks. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Horizontal (lateral) communication, among equals in different departments, is ongoing and effective.    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Upward communication (from subordinates to supervisor) is effective (fast and accurate).                |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Downward communication (from supervisor to subordinate) is effective (fast and accurate).               |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. The grapevine is widely used.                                                                           |   |   |   |   |   |   |

### Section 4 Communications Methods

Definition: Communications methods include techniques, devices, or media.

|                                                                                                                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. A wide variety of communications methods are used to convey information.                                                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. The specific type of method used is tailored to the content of the message and the person(s) who are to receive the message. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Important information is presented both verbally and in writing.                                                             |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Too much reliance is placed on written communications.                                                                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. The communications methods used are effective.                                                                               |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Greater emphasis is placed on the method of sending a message than the content of the message.                               |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. Opportunities and methods for meaningful face-to-face discussion exist.                                                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |

The following written and verbal communications methods should be rated on both the frequency and effectiveness of their use.

| WRITTEN METHODS       | FREQUENCY OF USE |   |   |   |   |   | EFFECTIVENESS OF USE |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
|                       | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. Memoranda          |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9. Informal notes     |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. Employee handbook |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11. Routine bulletins |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |

| WRITTEN METHODS                                             | FREQUENCY OF USE |   |   |   |   |   | EFFECTIVENESS OF USE |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
|                                                             | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. Suggestion boxes                                        |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 13. Bulletin boards                                         |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 14. Reports                                                 |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 15. House organs (e.g., newspapers, newsletters, magazines) |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |

| VERBAL METHODS                                                                    | FREQUENCY OF USE |   |   |   |   |   | EFFECTIVENESS OF USE |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
|                                                                                   | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 16. Informal, spontaneous conversations                                           |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 17. One-to-one scheduled conferences                                              |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 18. Department meetings                                                           |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 19. Routine weekly or monthly briefings by immediate supervisors                  |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 20. Special briefings on important changes or urgent matters                      |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 21. Telephone calls (internal)                                                    |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 22. Employee communications councils (representative cross section of the school) |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 23. Social gatherings (e.g., parties, special dinners, etc.)                      |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 24. Public address or intercom systems                                            |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 25. The grapevine                                                                 |                  |   |   |   |   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |   |

## Section 5 Message Content

**Definition:** The content of a communication is the substance of the message or the topics covered.

|                                                                                                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Message content is factual, accurate, and correct.                                                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Messages are carefully organized and contain a logical sequence of ideas or facts.                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. The wording of messages is adapted to the particular medium (listener or reader) and to the situation. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. The purpose of messages is stated and understood.                                                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Message content is important and relevant.                                                             |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Message content is balanced and presents both bad and good news in an impartial manner.                |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## THE PRACTICES

|                                                                                                                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. The main ideas and key points of a message are simplified and                                                                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8. Messages tell who, what, where, when, why, and how.                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9. Messages avoid conflict and discuss                                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. Messages contain current and complete information.                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11. The meaning of message content is clear (not contradictory) and requires little or no interpretation by the reader or listener. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 12. Messages contain specific and concrete rather than general and vague.                                                           |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 13. Messages are brief and to the point.                                                                                            |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 14. Messages are stated in a positive (no "put down") and useful tone.                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Section 6 Communications Timing

**Definition:** Timing involves such factors as (1) frequency, (2) spacing, and (3) circumstances when a message is sent and received.

|                                                                                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The timing of important messages is carefully planned and coordinated to increase effectiveness. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Necessary information reaches people at the opportune time (when needed).                        |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. People's questions and requests are responded to promptly.                                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Communications are continuous and organized rather than occasional and sporadic at the moment.   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Important communications are spaced rather than sent several at the same time.                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Communications are rushed.                                                                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. Important communications occur before something happens rather than after something happens.     |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8. Notice about deadlines and important activities is given sufficiently in advance.                |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9. Urgent information reaches people promptly.                                                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. Important, but non-urgent information, is conveyed during peak work periods.                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Section 7

## Feedback to Communications

**Definition:** Feedback involves the receiver (reader or listener) of a message providing the sender (speaker or writer) with a response that indicates whether the content is understood as well as the feedback.

|                                                                                                                                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The system for eliciting feedback is effective.                                                                                            |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. A system exists for verifying that all important communications are actually received.                                                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Supervision is made to verify that the content of all important messages is understood.                                                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Supervision is made to evaluate new practices and changes following their implementation.                                                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. The providing of feedback is valued and rewarded.                                                                                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Evaluation of the organization's communication system and programs takes place at least once each year.                                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. The immediate supervisor solicits ideas and suggestions for improving departmental effectiveness generally and communication specifically. |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Section 8

## Supervisor-Subordinate Communications

**Definition:** This category considers communications (and relationships) between individuals holding positions at different (higher or lower) levels in the organization.

|                                                                                                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Your supervisor is visible and interested.                                                                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. You and your supervisor understand each other.                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Your supervisor understands your job responsibilities, needs, and problems.                                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. You know your job duties and responsibilities from an up-to-date and comprehensive written job description. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Your supervisor is interested in you as a person, as well as in your work.                                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Your job goals and priorities are clear and mutually compatible (non-contradictory).                        |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. You understand the scope, limits, and boundaries for meeting your goals and meeting job responsibilities.   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8. Your supervisor has integrity and keeps his/her word and promises.                                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |

# The Questionnaire

|                                                                                                                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Your supervisor is helpful and facilitates your work.                                                                           |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Your supervisor is approachable and available when needed.                                                                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Your supervisor gives consistent direction and guidance when given.                                                             |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Your supervisor communicates with you in an effective and clear fashion that is consistent with the task.                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Your supervisor keeps you informed as to how you are being supervised by important events.                                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Your supervisor affords you a full opportunity to express yourself and to ask questions and to respond.                         |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. Your supervisor is positive and publicly gives appropriate feedback.                                                            |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8. Your supervisor has an effective communication style.                                                                           |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9. Your supervisor gives a consistent effort and is consistently helpful.                                                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. Your supervisor communicates effectively with you, gives appropriate feedback, and is consistent in his/her actions.           |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11. Your supervisor supports, encourages, and communicates with you when discussing the task and the team.                         |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 12. Your supervisor has a visible open-door policy and this factor has a positive effect on you.                                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 13. Your supervisor is useful with you.                                                                                            |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 14. Your supervisor is strongly supportive and gives a consistent effort.                                                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 15. Your supervisor is supportive and positive in the task domain.                                                                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 16. Your supervisor demonstrates that he/she is an active participant in your work and provides appropriate feedback and guidance. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 17. Your supervisor is fair, reasonable, and you are able to disagree.                                                             |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Section 3

### Sources of Information

Indicate the source of information available: (1) other people; (2) personal observation; and (3) documentation.

|                                                                                                                                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The topic is common knowledge to the general public and does not require special knowledge or information to be available.                |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. The important facts/relationships/information is common sense and readily accessible to you.                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. The source of important information is readily accessible through readily available sources.                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Information can be obtained through personal observation.                                                                                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. The people with information are readily accessible through                                                                                |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. The person(s) is/are readily accessible and can be interviewed and/or given information about the topic.                                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7. The person(s) is/are readily accessible and can be interviewed and/or given information about the topic and the information is available. |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                               |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                               |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 12. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 13. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 14. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 15. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 16. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 17. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 18. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 19. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 20. The topic is readily accessible and can be obtained through                                                                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Section 10 Critical Incidents

**Definition:** Critical incidents are especially noteworthy or important events (e.g., sexual harassment, narcotic problems, special recognition or assistance).

1. What do you consider to be the *one* most serious communications weakness in the school? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What do you consider to be the *one* greatest communications strength in the school? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What *one* recommendation do you believe would most improve communication in the school? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## TO ILLUSTRATE

The following school districts and schools shared some examples of their successful school-site communications practices.

- ⑧ **Dallas Independent School District** 3700 Ross Ave.  
Dallas, Tex. 75204  
Larry Auerbach, Special Assistant to the Superintendent-Communications

Good communications and shared decision making go hand-in-hand in the DSD. The Dallas model provides numerous opportunities for employees to provide input, solve problems, become informed, and participate in the decision-making process. A working and analysis group composed of key staff members reviews feedback and forwards it to the superintendent and appropriate members of the management team for action. The Leadership Council, composed of elected administrators from all levels, participates as an element of the management team. Several school-site practices are particularly noteworthy:

- **Communications Contact.** A DSD policy assigns one staff person at each school to be the designated

communications contact. This person is responsible for disseminating newsworthy information happening in the school. Each week, several individuals submit information about current events, short success stories, special awards, etc., which is then published in a districtwide newsletter.

- **Newsletters.** Several schools produce a school-based newsletter to inform parents, volunteers, business partners, and school personnel of current school highlights.
  - **Communications Seminar.** Through a Positive Parents program, an annual seminar is conducted to train school communications contacts and volunteers about public relations and media relations practices. Approximately 20 local media and communications professionals organize and conduct the training sessions.
  - **Communications Mini-Grants.** Through the Positive Parents program, mini-grants are awarded to local school volunteers as seed money for neighborhood public relations projects. These mini-grants allow local schools to do a better job of communicating with their neighborhoods. Examples of projects over the past four years include: brochures for newcomers and visitors, message marquee, billboard campaign, flyers, advertisements, and walls of fame to encourage student achievement.
  - **Principal's Packet.** The district sends principals a monthly packet of materials highlighting key calendar dates, pertinent media materials, and information to share with teachers, students, and parents.
- ⑨ **Independent School District 279** 11200 93rd Ave. North  
PO. Box 327  
Owen Arts Schools Maple Grove, Minn. 55369  
Bill Dix, Coordinator of School/Community Relations

Independent School District 279's 66 1/2 square miles encompass nine communities and more than 80,000 residents. The district needed a simple and quick method to receive feedback from a broad base of residents.

The School/Community Relations Department developed a feedback device that would provide quick response. Key communicators were selected by principals in the 11 buildings—people already active in school support organizations. Additionally, all governmental officials were included as well as other key per-

sons such as the clergy and school staff members.

A newsletter is published six to eight times a year depending on news flow and need. The items are generally written for the 30-second reader and each issue provides a postage-paid feedback card. Response from the key communicators has been about 50 percent, much greater than other non-forced response surveys.

In the past year, this "Elite Market Survey" received information about the school calendar, the release of lists of student names, methods to be used for communicating bond election needs, ideas for articles in district publications, and a school closing question. Communicators are encouraged to write comments on the cards about other matters. The district pays the postage. The program is evaluated on a regular basis.

69 Oak Lawn Community 94th Southwest Hwy.  
High School-District 229 Oak Lawn, Ill. 60453  
William C. Hill, Director of  
Public Relations and Student Activities

Students in the Oak Lawn Community High School, District 229, participate in newly revised class officer election procedures as part of National Student Leadership Week, sponsored by the NASSP Division of Student Activities.

The new procedures are designed to encourage more class officer accountability and to increase student

awareness, interest, and participation in the election process.

The program has increased student voting by more than 50 percent and more than doubled the number of students seeking candidacy for each class office. Specifically, interested candidates attend an orientation meeting in early April, conducted after school by the director of student activities and the student council faculty sponsors. Requirements for each office, officer expectations, election procedures, etc., are reviewed.

Department chairpersons, faculty class sponsors and staff members are provided inservice training in support of the election process and activities in their classrooms and organizations. Candidates have one week to obtain petitions and campaign. During National Leadership Awareness Week, one day is designated as "election" day. School is conducted on a special election schedule. Each class attends a special meeting where candidates for class president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary deliver campaign speeches. Following the speeches, each homeroom teacher, sponsor, and administrator supervises the class elections.

The winners of all elections, and students who have earned distinction for their attendance and achievement in academic, cocurricular, and athletic areas, are formally announced at the All School Student Awards and Recognition Assembly in early May. Parents and members of the community are invited to attend.

Walter St. John, a former principal, assistant superintendent, and professor of educational administration, is president of the Management Communications Institute in North New Portland, Maine. He is also adjunct professor of management in Thomas College, Waterville, Maine.



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